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WALT WHITMAN.

BY LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX.

TALKING of Whitman, Symonds said, is like talking of the Cosmos. Indeed, to talk of any very great man is something like exploring the universe; and, when one has done, the best one can hope is to have considered one's own point of view, to have found some ground for the faith that is in one and to have given account of one's little personal acquisitions upon the journey through a bigger consciousness.

Whatever one may feel of Whitman—and it is interesting to note that very few people who know him at all feel indifferently—one cannot but see that he fares better in the hands of the great than in the hands of the average man and that the profounder the mind that comes to him the greater the appreciation given. The instant recognition which Whitman won from men like Emerson, Swinburne (despite his recanting), Edmund Gosse, John Addington Symonds, John Burroughs, William Michael Rossetti, Tennyson, Dante Rossetti, William Bell Scott, Frederic Myers, and the exquisitely sensitive Edward Carpenter, must count for something in weighing the personality and power of the man, no less than his great attraction for children, for women like Mrs. Gilchrist, Mrs. Berenson, Mrs. Burroughs, and for the so-called plain man and the savage. There is a pretty tale of how Whitman, when he was out West, visited a lot of captive Indians in the company of a number of well-known politicians, government officials and editors. The distinguished guests were duly announced and their offices explained to the Indians, who remained perfectly impassive and stolid. Finally, at the end of the line, slouched Whitman, then too little known to be announced or introduced. The Indian chief looked him steadily in the eye for a moment and then advanced, extending his hand, and said "How!"

while all the other Indians followed suit, surrounding him, shaking his hand and offering him their single word of English greeting, "How!" President Lincoln, standing at the window of the White House one day, saw Whitman sauntering by, and commented, "Well, *he* looks like a *man*"; while Emerson is said to have handed the first edition of "Leaves of Grass" to O'Connor with the words, "Americans abroad may now come home, for unto us a man is born!" This impression of force and virility, of power to cope with life for himself and for others, is a definite factor in Whitman's personality. He seems in his life in the hospital during war times to have been positively health-giving in himself, and his assertions of this power tally with the doctrines of the varying new cults that rely upon the power of mind over matter. "I can testify," he wrote at that time, "that friendship has literally cured a fever, and the medicine of daily affection a bad wound."

Whitman did not go to the war. His brother George was one of the first to enlist; and it is once more a fact bearing upon his own personality that he seems never to have considered the question as to whether or not he would be justified in bearing arms for his country. His whole feeling about life forbade killing or quarrelling on any terms, for any cause. Perhaps upon no other American did the war make so profound an impression:

"My book and the war are one,
Merged in its spirit, I and mine—as the contest hinged on thee.
As a wheel on its axis turns, this Book, unwitting to itself
Around the idea of thee."

But his part in it he seems from the beginning to have conceived as that of helper, consoler and healer, and never that of the fighter. His one phrase of reproach against the South was cut out of the later editions of his poems; and he maintained, except for his enthusiastic love for Lincoln, the attitude of the non-partisan observer.

"We walk among disputes and assertions, but reject not the disputers
nor anything that is asserted;

We hear the bawling and din—we are reached at by divisions, jealousies,
recriminations on every side,

.

Yet we walk unheld, free."

This refusal to take sides falls together, of course, with his refusal in later life to take any part in discussions or to read any polemical literature. Any books dealing with the discussions of science and religion he rejected, apparently always realizing the unity at the apex of diversities. As science was the analysis of reality through knowledge, so religion was its synthesis again through love, and he refused to set himself on one side or the other.

His health, vigor, and peacefulness were no more a part of his personality than his feeling for democracy, for the equality, even the unity, of all races and peoples. It is more difficult to do away with distinctions than one thinks. One can realize that it is the only fine and real way to do so; and, seen from a great enough height, the ridiculousness of the stress we lay upon our little differences is of course evident. To the supreme creative and upholding force one can easily see that our little variations in worldly conditions, in tastes, in intelligence, must seem infinitely smaller than to us the microscopic differences in the size of wasps' waists would be, and as absurd a matter for pluming oneself upon; and yet the whole of human civilization has been built up upon these differences between man and man. Whitman's vision carried at once beyond any such small matter. He uttered the word *en masse*, realizing that humanity was in reality one and a totality, and that no man can reach very much higher than the whole to which he belongs, any more than a chain can be stronger than its weakest link. To every man who should be drawn to him he desires to assert two things—that the possibilities of growth and goodness are infinite, and that evil is not fatal. To every one, however weak and repulsive and thwarted—and his list of such is, as all his lists are, singularly complete and inclusive—he brings the message that life is “immense in passion, pulse and power, cheerful and for freest action formed.” There is a profound sacredness, he wishes to assert, in every human experience, since to bring it to the birth, the globe lay preparing quintillions of years without one plant or animal.

“And I will show that there is no imperfection in the present and can be none in the future;

And I will show that whatever happens to anybody, it may be turned to beautiful results—and I will show that nothing can happen more beautiful than death.”

Any man bearing within him habitually any such large measure of health and hope can easily be understood to have healing powers, and we can realize how the thought should result in that "almost irrepressible joyousness" which, one of his friends records, "shone from his face and seemed to pervade his whole body." He has the force and consoling power of being sure of himself.

"And I know I am solid and sound,
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow;
And all are written to me, and I must find out what the writing means."

There is, indeed, a very effective force to be built on and of this sensation that the universe and the eternal processes are all right, and that the only difficulty is to be alive enough to understand and to cope with them. Seen from the outside, the events of Whitman's life were certainly not what one could label flamboyantly successful; but his sense of life, his conviction of the rightness and success of the part he was playing, is, I suppose, the most assured ever recorded in other than sacred literatures. Browning had somewhat the same feeling and somewhat the same sort of health-giving personality; but, in his case, the antagonism aroused was much weaker and the assurance much less strong, as any one may see who studies *La Saisiaz*, Christmas Eve and Easter Day. His verdict was that sorrow preponderated in life, unless this life proved to be the threshold of real life, the pupil's place, the beginning of experience. If one compare this with Whitman, one finds it to be the difference between questioning and asserting, between seeking and finding. Whether Whitman was justified or not is far too wide a question to answer, but what he says is:

"I know I am august;
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood;
I exist as I am—that is enough;
If no other in the world be aware, I sit content;
And if each and all be aware, I sit content.
One world is aware, and by far the largest to me, and that is myself;
And whether I come to my own to-day, or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can wait."

In the mean time he lived and believed firmly in himself, and his mission and his life were ruled by love and faith; intense love of the world and of man permeates every leaf of his book, unshakable faith, too, in humanity—in man and, taken separately, in men. Aggressively he asserts it:

“Through me many long dumb voices;
Voices of interminable generations of slaves;
Voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons;
Voices of the diseased and the despairing, and of thieves and dwarfs;
Voices of the cycles of preparation and accretion,
And of the threads that connect the stars—

And of the rights of them others are down upon,
Of the trivial flat, foolish, despised, etc.

I embody all presences outlawed or suffering,
See myself in prison shaped like another man,
And feel the dull unintermittal pain.”

This feeling of being united to all the evil as well as all the good, this indignant assertion,

“Who degrades another, degrades me.”
“The weakest and shallowest is deathless in me;”

this sense given to so few mortals, that the soul is not only the little bit of consciousness that filters through the defective and trifling organism of one's own brain, but is all consciousness and all life, rising ecstatic through all the universe and sweeping with the true gravitation, speeding through space—speeding through heaven and the stars:

“Speeding amid the seven satellites, and the broad ring and the diameter of eighty thousand miles.

Speeding with tailed meteors—throwing fireballs like the rest,

Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning,
Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,
I tread day and night such roads,”

is the sense to be taken mainly into account when we attempt to sum up Whitman's personality.

“I am not contained between my hat and my boots,” he says colloquially, lest propounding the same truth more transcendent-

ly some plain, holy man may miss his meaning, or fancy him to be uttering a philosopher's truth, some distant thing for scholars to know. He said it so that it might carry conviction to all who, running, should read. To the commonest day-laborer, digging the road, to his pets, the 'bus-drivers and the firemen, he addresses it: you, too, you are not contained between your hat and your boots. Invisible, unseen threads, like spider's filaments, like the invisible ether connecting stars, these weave out from you and mesh themselves into the infinite web of the Cosmos. You are continually sending out thoughts that journey through endless intricacies of immeasurable consciousness, you are drawing in and breathing forth again immortal soul-stuff, and there, digging the ditch, apparently bending over between your hat and your boots, is the *you* of unutterable, unending significance, there is the concentrated point of all that you see and think, all that you dimly conceive and dream, all that you are to become; for, when you reach and stand upon what is now but your distant vista, there will be new horizons stretching beyond toward which you may journey, new sites, beyond and beyond and ever beyond that. For, in due time, accomplishment journeys after conception, and no man need be fretted and worried lest out of the root of his being no growth spring up. In every man, the seed of the divine is sown and there is infinite possibility of flower and fruit; what seems stunted and sterile is but that which waits upon time for fruition. The universe is good, and its rhythmic swing is part of the goodness; and, as it balances between light and shade, success and failure, night and day, joy and sorrow, hope and frustration, it is bearing more and more into life and consciousness. Only, no point is final; there is no graspable goal; knocked down, we must rise up the stronger to the fight; as a horse, when he has run, runs again, as a man who has accomplished sets himself a larger task. This, or something like this, is the mood which Whitman induces, helping each man to liberate himself from his personal fate and to identify himself with the whole of life, with the prisoner and the president equally, transforming all events into the power to wait grandly upon eternal issues.

It is easy, in a general way, to admit the value and the worth of such a doctrine; but the difficulty arises when we try to apply it to specific cases. Generations of training and hardening into the habit of selection have made life almost wholly a matter

of choice; the whole plane upon which our heritage has landed us is one of discrimination between better and worse, beautiful and ugly. But Whitman eliminates comparison. Art draws lines; mysticism industriously wipes them out. Whitman breaks bounds, erases outlines and throws up formless masses of earth-works, which, perhaps, a later generation will once more outline into a larger, a more inclusive beauty than we have yet known. His personal task was not that of the finisher, the polisher. He created masses from which a form but vaguely emerges, half embodied and half melted into the formless chaos behind. Like one infinitely greater than he, he rejected only scribes and Pharisees. "Conformity," he says, "goes to the fourth-remove." It is interesting to note, in passing, that the one unpardonable sin in Whitman's eyes is the same and only sin which Shelley and Browning could not pardon, and that it is, likewise, the one unassailable virtue of average man, namely, conventionality, living by rote, by imitation, by fear of disapproval, instead of by the light of the soul and the inspiration of the inner voice. "Be wicked," Whitman writes, "rather than virtuous out of conformity or fear," and this, perhaps, throws light upon the parable of the prodigal son.

Together with his refusal of distinctions goes his glorification of the present moment. He turned his back upon the romantic, the studied, the far-fetched, to shed new glamour over the nearest, easiest, meanest, and to show their inherent and abiding divinity. Not far-away times, not chivalric adventure—the fighting of dragons and the winning of fair ladies—were to him more important, beautiful, joyous, than the passing faces in the street, the shifting aspects of sea and sky. Not carnage, and killing and war were to him more exciting than night and peace. No European Cathedral contained more of God's grandeur and eternity than the Brooklyn ferry. He shifted all qualities from the perceived to the perceiver. It is true that the more dead we are the more stimulation we require to help us perceive beauty and grandeur, and the more alive we are the more significance we have power to project into daily sights and sounds. Whitman himself was so keenly alive that the flood of glory seems never to have run shallow for him. Personally, his tastes were of the simplest; he enjoyed a game of twenty questions with children, a day under a tree with a book, a ferry ride or a car ride or a walk alone by

night. Out of a salary of fifteen hundred dollars a year, he managed to feel very prosperous himself and to give his mother an allowance.

He said of himself that he was most fully himself in loving his comrades and in singing his songs. That the whole of himself was never included in the casual and the temporal, was a most insistent sense with him, and one that pervades all his poems:

"Trippers and askers surround me;
People I meet—the effect upon me of my early life, or the world and
city I live in, or the nation,
The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors, old and
new,
My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,

Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtfulness, the
fitful events,
These come to me days and nights and go from me again,
But they are not the ME, myself.

"Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am;
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary;
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable, certain rest,
Looking with side-curved head, curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game, and watching and wondering at it."

And again:

"Aware now amid all that blab whose echoes recoil upon me, I have
not once had the least idea who or what I am,
But that before all my arrogant poems the real ME stands yet un-
touched, untold, altogether unreached,
Withdrawn, far, mocking me with mock-congratulatory signs and
bows,
With peals of distant, ironical laughter at everything I have written,
Pointing in silence to these songs and then to the sand beneath."

This haunting sense, ever present with him, of the hidden reality behind appearances, is perhaps what gives the strange appearance of intimacy to his eyes. Of all the published portraits there are two which seem to give something of the personality of the man. One is the picture he himself preferred, taken when he was sixty-two, sitting in a rustic chair, turned in profile; on his finger, held out before him, a butterfly has alighted; his other hand is thrust in his pocket, an habitual attitude, if one may generalize from the pictures. The general impression is of re-

pose and patience, of one considering profound matters at ease,—“as of a man preoccupied with his own soul.” The other significant picture is a photograph of the head only, taken at the age of thirty-five. He has no tie on, a shirt open at the neck, showing the button of the undershirt. Eyes and mouth are the significant features. The eyes are gentle but searching, insistent, almost repellently intimate. The mouth is large, loose, sensual; and, though it shows tolerance and generosity, the expression is, at first, repellent. The face seems to rob us of all our reserves; it is so canny, so knowing that it almost suggests hypocrisy. Once one analyzes this impression, one understands that it is not that he wilfully hides or disguises himself, but that so profound a consciousness is, by the nature of it, a mystery to the lesser mind and that the fault lies in us, not in him. Our revolt is that we cannot know him, and yet he, looking out, knows us better than we dare know ourselves. Burroughs says that, when Whitman was past sixty, he had doubtless “the finest head this age or country has seen. . . . The lines were so simple, so free, so strong. High-arching brows; straight, clear-cut nose; heavy-lidded, blue eyes; forehead not thrust out and emphasized, but a vital part of a symmetrical, dome-shaped head; ear large and the most delicately carved I have ever seen.” It is a pity that this ear is covered by hair and beard in all the photographs, and that the head, in many of them, is covered by a hat. In the picture taken at the age of fifty, the shape of the forehead shows as the high and somewhat narrow forehead of the idealist, so different from the broad, full forehead of the artist, and the insistent knowingness of the eyes comes out strongly, too, in this picture.

Turning from his personality to his work, it is as difficult as ever to sum up or to say anything conclusive. There are pages when he seems to be monotonously enumerating things or cognitions; pages, too, when he is presenting ideas as vast and as incomprehensible as the universe. There are pages where we feel that the light he is flooding over existence is almost too glaring and dazzling to bear, and parts that are vague and obscure as a dream, and we grapple in vain to find out what he is driving at. Without one thing, he warns you, it is useless to try to read him, but he does not tell you what the one thing is. You may guess at it many times and not hit it; your novitiate, he warns you, must be long and exhausting, the whole past theory of your life

and all conformity to the lives around you must be abandoned. His poems, like all great forces, are as like to do evil as good, and his meaning is not to be come at by study. He will not emerge for you in company, or in a house and least of all in a library. It is just possible that alone upon a high hill, or sailing at sea, or on a quiet island or by merely carrying the book thrust in your clothing as you walk, its mystical meaning may penetrate you.

If one compare Whitman with another contemporary genius, like him mystical and immense, with Robert Browning, it seems that Browning offers a world and Whitman a universe. Browning gives us types, kings, bishops, priests, lovers, actors, painters, sculptors, musicians, charlatans, mediums, popes, lawyers, judges, young women, girls, wives, worldly women, duchesses, saintly women, wicked women; but Whitman goes further: he does not stop to describe his multitudes or to set them into self-describing actions; he merely enumerates them; he hands you the catalogue, the surge of the great human procession as it passes, and trusts you to do the rest. The Yankee, the Southern planter, the Kentuckian, a boatman, a Hoosier, a Badger, Buckeye, a Canadian, a man from Vermont or from Maine, a Texan ranchman, a raftsman, a learner, a teacher, a farmer, a mechanic, an artist, gentleman, sailor, Quaker, prisoner, fancyman, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest, men, men, men of every hue, trade, rank, caste and religion, from Africa, Europe, Asia, and the New World, he posits and states them, only to gather them together and show their underlying unity, their one breathing body, their similar course, being born, going round and round, passing and coming again, developing from the quahaug in its callous shell to the genius, thin-skinned and alive at every pore to every wafted breeze.

Like Browning, he was born a poet; one who had a word to say to the world and was determined, despite all opposition, to get it said. Like Browning, it was many years before he won any way at all; and, unlike Browning, he died before any sort of general appreciation was offered him. But he himself asserted that the test of his poems could not be set for some hundred years. He felt a supreme and righteous contempt for the trade of writing, *as a trade*, and for the men "who write all over the surface of the earth and never dig a foot in the ground—just everlastingly write." His own power of suggestion is very great. Without description, without indirect forms, such as parable and

narrative, classical or historical allusion, he draws the reader into his atmosphere and spreads his feeling of good comradeship, faith, trust, and cheer about him. The very obscurity of some of his lines seems to lend them thought-suggesting power. They give you no rest any more than the horizon-line which shifts as you move toward it, ever escaping you. Perhaps the difficulty arises from the fact that of ultimate truth there is, and can be, no statement. One uses some tiny symbol, like the word "immortality," to stand for a truth which no man can ever dream of in its actuality. There are statements, like those contained in the opening chapter of St. John, deep enough to drown all our meanings in.

Shelley and Browning both give us intimations of prenatal existence and of future incarnations; but the theory of the immortality and unity of the soul is never absent from Whitman; it is his constant iteration:

"O, living always, always dying,
O, the burials of me, past and present,
O me, while I stride ahead, material, visible, imperious as ever,
O me, what I was for years, now dead (I lament not, I am content),
O, to disengage myself from those corpses of me, which I turn and
look at, where I cast them,
To pass on (O, living, always living!), and leave the corpses behind!"

His sense of eternity is never broken in upon; and, with his unparalleled ability to project himself into all life, and identify himself with all conceptions, comes his unbending power to trust the vast, ungraspable issues of eternity.

Swinburne, in his *Whitmania* essay, regrets Whitman's lack of education, using education presumably in the sense of a sophisticated intimacy with worldly distinctions,—the kind of education which is pumped into a man by tutors, university lectures, books and travel—in fact, an elaborated initiation into mediocre opinions. As a matter of fact, Whitman was quite as well read, if not as much read, as Swinburne. He was thoroughly versed in the great books of original and primal force, and had a profound education of the kind that is dug out of oneself. The faith that all human knowledge and experience are contained in the soul some place, if we but dig deep enough to get them, hold still enough and ponder long enough to catch and haul them to the surface of consciousness, was a faith which Whitman shared with all seers, prophets, and men of first rank, original genius. How

much of their achievement would Tolstoy and Ibsen, Browning and Wordsworth, presumably ascribe to schools and university education? And what would Isaiah and Jeremiah have thought of giving years to the study of theological dispute? Mr. Swinburne knows as well as any one that no great man is excusable who does other than search his soul for his truth and present it again in his own personal form. It was all of a piece with Whitman's democracy to use the rough unmeasured form he chose. He eschewed distinctions, he despised scholarship, he rejected authority, he never quoted and never imitated. Dante quoted Virgil, Tennyson quoted Dante, Shakespeare quoted everybody, and everybody since has quoted Shakespeare; but Whitman quoted no one. Mr. Swinburne is a poet, and so great a poet that it is pathetic to think he sometimes mistook himself for so small a thing as a mere critic. Never in his prose is he capable of speaking from the whole and the unified consciousness. Some little partial, hysterical fit of anger, indignation, denial, raillery or admiration seizes him and spouts out a torrent of words from him, words that fit only into judgments and records when they swing in his long, majestic, rhythmic, measured lines, so intricately rhymed. With such wonderful facility do words jut out at his least idea that it is difficult to fancy what sort of fantastic play they would have had with him but for his inborn metrical genius. Mr. Swinburne accuses Whitman of trying to be a thinker and yet unable to think, a singer and unable to sing. One can easily fancy that some of Whitman's enthusiastic admirers, comparing him with Shakespeare and Shelley, to the detriment of the latter, should have aroused Swinburne's vehement ire. It is quite true that Whitman habitually delves below the upper surface of logical reason for his thought, and also true that in his work he eliminates all process and presents only conclusions. He had about him nothing at all of the artist and the craftsman; perhaps he had fewer talents than any great poet ever known. He presents not a pretty combination of abilities, a gift for rhyme, a keen visual sense, a delicate sensitiveness to verbal cadences; he presents Whitman, a robust whole indivisible as atmosphere; he is not of the make-up of a scholar or an analyst; he is of the make-up of a prophet and seer. He never argues or coaxes. He flings a truth down like a bomb in front of you, careless whether it explode and annihilate you or not. Like the prophet Isaiah

he exhorts, he predicts, he announces visions and communications; he claims supernal powers of vision and knowledge of truth, but he refuses to reason with you or give you logical evidence. He *knew* that the whole solution of life lay in love, and that to love God with all your might and your neighbor as yourself was the first and bravest end of man. He *knew* himself divine, and that all were divine and worthy equally of respect and honor; he knew the universe instinct with life and vitality and divinity, and the very clay clods beneath our feet as latent, possible man. With St. Francis he shared the ecstatic love of animals, breezes, trees, and it is upon this whole-hearted desire for human brotherhood, this unlimited, unbounded belief in love and pardon and infinite growth, that he based, as did Shelley before him, his claim to brotherhood with "Him Crucified."

"My spirit to yours, dear brother,

Do not mind because many sounding your name do not understand you,

I do not sound your name, but I understand you,

I specify you with joy, O my comrade, to salute you and to salute those who are with you, before and since, and those to come after,

That we all labor together transmitting the same charge and succession

.

Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are."

As to his music, it is certainly more irregular, more broken by prolonged strange successions of dissonances and difficult solutions, more unmeasured and difficult of analysis than that of any preceding English poet. Indeed, it comes nearer to having the swing and grandeur of certain psalms, the fortieth chapter of Isaiah and Deborah's Song of Triumph in the King James version of the Bible than the measure of any English poem. It is not to be overlooked that the difference between Whitman's music and that of our earlier, more lyrical poets is in the same line of progression that modern music has moved. That whereas Milton produces splendid organ music with lyric intermezzos, and Swinburne has at command a whole orchestra playing the various instruments separately, teaching the flute the very note of the nightingale, or getting from the violin the weird, sad cry of the sea-mew, or leading the whole orchestra in superb and final choruses, Whitman gives the human voice alone, in irregular,

prolonged recitative, only here and there introducing a little singing melody as in "Tears, tears, tears," "Come, lovely and soothing Death," and occasionally mere slangy colloquial talk of the street. On this matter of slang and common speech there are two things to be said. Doubtless, the grave-digger's colloquy in "Hamlet" and the porter's interlude in "Macbeth," and other episodic interruptions of a like nature, now so integral a part of the Shakespearian plays to us, were at the time but the appeal direct to the populace, the common jest and colloquialism of the street offered to bring the people into closer touch. There is something a little shocking in the familiarity, the lack of reserve and dignity in such lines as—

"I tucked my trowser-ends in my boots and went and had a good time,
You should have been with us that day over the chowder-kettle."

One can only reflect that Whitman wrote for posterity and for the ages. Language grows in dignity and in significance and power by distance. Compare the sense of strangeness and power with which a foreign language or an archaism touches us and the insignificance of common familiar talk. "Be not afraid, it is I," lost all its serength when the little child, eager only for substance, translated it into "Don't be scared, it's me coming." Take that fine old passage from the Suttas:

"Like a lion not startled at noises,
Like the wind not caught in a net,
Like the lotus not stained by the water,
Let me wander alone like a rhinoceros,"

and practically all its beauty consists in its alien atmosphere, in its suggestion of strange, far-away sights and sounds. So perhaps what comes upon us to-day, in Whitman, with the shock of the commonplace may some day be as dignified in its strangeness and beauty as the lines:

"Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story."

Two other points which Mr. Swinburne holds against Whitman are that he is a rhetorician; that he offers us mere words and that he shows no chivalry toward women. Now, rhetoric is the

love of high-sounding, fire-new words merely for the words' sake; but this is no accusation to bring against Whitman, who believed himself a prophet with a message as fervently as ever Isaiah or Jeremiah did. He was noticeably oblivious of the sound and texture of words, as well as negligent of their associational value. Whatever words conveyed his meaning most plainly, swiftly, precisely, familiarly, those words he used. His speech was forthright and plain, addressed to the common man, to the ditch-digger as no less important than the Hebrew scholar.

As to the lack of chivalric sentiment toward woman, that must simply be handed over to each individual woman to decide whether she is more honored as Venus, Iseult, Dolores, Félise, the ravenlocked woman in the "Triumph of Time," or in Whitman's insistent mention of her as the race-mother, the equal of man, out of whom all creation is unfolded. But it becomes Mr. Swinburne less than any other English poet to make this accusation.

And now here one must glance at that peculiarity which cost Whitman much support, many friends and final recognition, his stubborn refusal to accept the conventional reserves. This mistake cost him Emerson's support; it is the flaw which robs him of many readers. In this connection, we must remember Whitman's theory of the glorification of creation and of creative force. There are no so-called love-poems in his work, there is much glorification of fatherhood and motherhood, and as deep calleth unto deep so his soul responds to the idea of thought and emotion taking upon themselves flesh and form and becoming visible and active in the material world. Woman was to him the great keeper of the race, and the helpmate of man. His love for his own mother he records as the chief affection of his life, and, after that, friendship or, as he preferred to call it, love of comrades.

Again, it is well to call to mind that it is the clean elemental consciousness, it is innocence and purity that most easily invest all processes with holiness and dignity, and possibly as men grow more and more to this altitude will the offence of this part of Whitman's writing become a negligible factor.

Throughout his life he practised faith, hope and charity. His whole object was to live and not to die, and to help other men to live and not to die, but to earn for the body and the mind what adheres and goes forward and is never dropped by death.

There remains one more element in Whitman to remark and one repeatedly brought to mind in three recent books of biography,* namely, the ascription to Whitman by his friends of almost supernal powers, and their unabashed comparison of him with the greatest masters of living. If we are to accept the statement of Mr. Binns and Mr. Carpenter, Whitman's early life was certainly not devoid of reproach. However completely he may have turned from that part of his life afterward, it would seem legitimately to divorce him from the assumption of the highest holiness. His way of feeling life and humanity was large, patient, far-seeing and loving, but his method was definitely to descend into the midst of natural life and spread cheer and good-will. There is another method, which is, living above the general level of righteousness, gradually to exalt that level. This seems to have been the method of such masters of living as St. Francis and Buddha and, above all, of the Supreme Human Pattern.

The note of the Christian Gospel, the note of self-surrender and renunciation, is certainly not sounded in its entirety in Whitman; and yet, disguised, it is there. That note of selflessness which is unworldliness and unconventionality, which refuses to preen itself with belongings and material things, that kind of renunciation which holds its whole life lightly on the hand for any man to take, that free and universal gift of the best of one's personality to whomsoever will partake, these Whitman most certainly had. The complete overcoming of fear and desire, the unafraid acceptance of death, are all forms of asceticism, for asceticism merely means choking out the lower that the higher may live; letting the small and partial self die to make room for the better and bigger self to thrive in the joyful assurance that wherever the little, the casual, the temporal fade, the purposeful and the eternal are conceived and grow. But not his unworldliness, his bigness, his extraordinary prophetic power, his cosmic consciousness, undeniable as these are, justify the claims made for him by his enthusiastic friends, that he stands on the pinnacle with the supreme Masters of Life.

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* "Walt Whitman," Henry Bryan Binns. E. P. Dutton & Co., 1906. "Days with Walt Whitman," Edward Carpenter. The Macmillan Co., 1906. "With Walt Whitman in Camden," Horace Traubel. Small, Maynard & Co., 1906.